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A TURKMEN FAIRY TALE

A MOUNTAIN OF GEMS

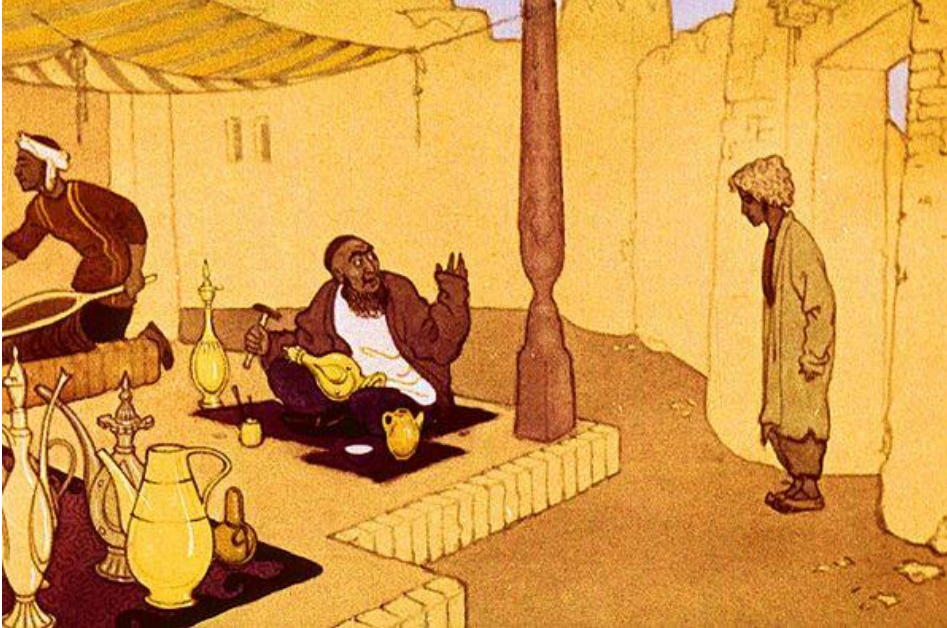


In a certain village there once lived an old widow who had one son, Mirali by name. The mother and son were very poor. The old woman combed wool and took in washing and in this way managed to earn enough to feed herself and her son.

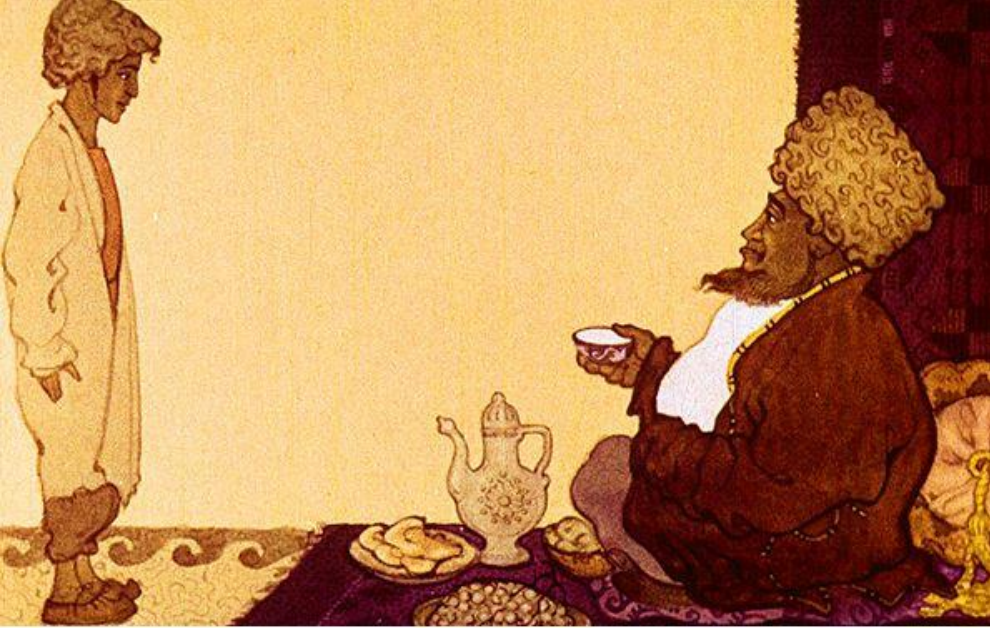


When Mirali grew up, his mother said to him:

"I haven't the strength to work any more, my son. You must find yourself work of some kind to do and so earn your keep."



"Very well," said Mirali, and off he went in search of work. He went here, and he went there, but nowhere could he find anything to do.



After a time he came to the house of a certain bai
(a rich, sometimes titled man in old Turkmenia).

"Do you need a workman, bai" Mirali asked.

"I do," the bai replied.

And he hired Mirali on the spot.



A day passed, and the bai did not ask his new workman to do anything at all. Another day passed, and the bai gave him no orders of any kind. A third day passed, and the bai seemed not so much as to notice him.

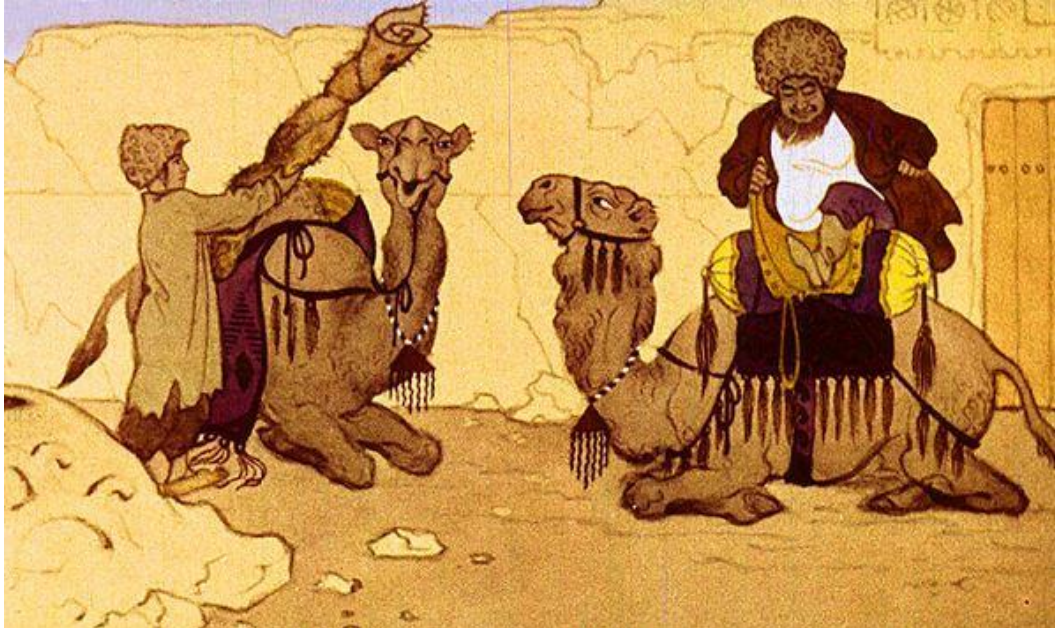
All this seemed very strange to Mirali who began to wonder why the bai had hired him.



So he went to him and asked:

"Shall I be getting any work to do, master?"

"Yes, yes," the bai replied, "I am going on a journey tomorrow, and you will come with me."



The following day the bai ordered Mirali to slaughter a bull and to skin it, and, this done, to bring four large sacks and prepare two camels for a journey.



The bull's hide and the sacks were put on one of the camels, the bai mounted the other, and off they started on their way.



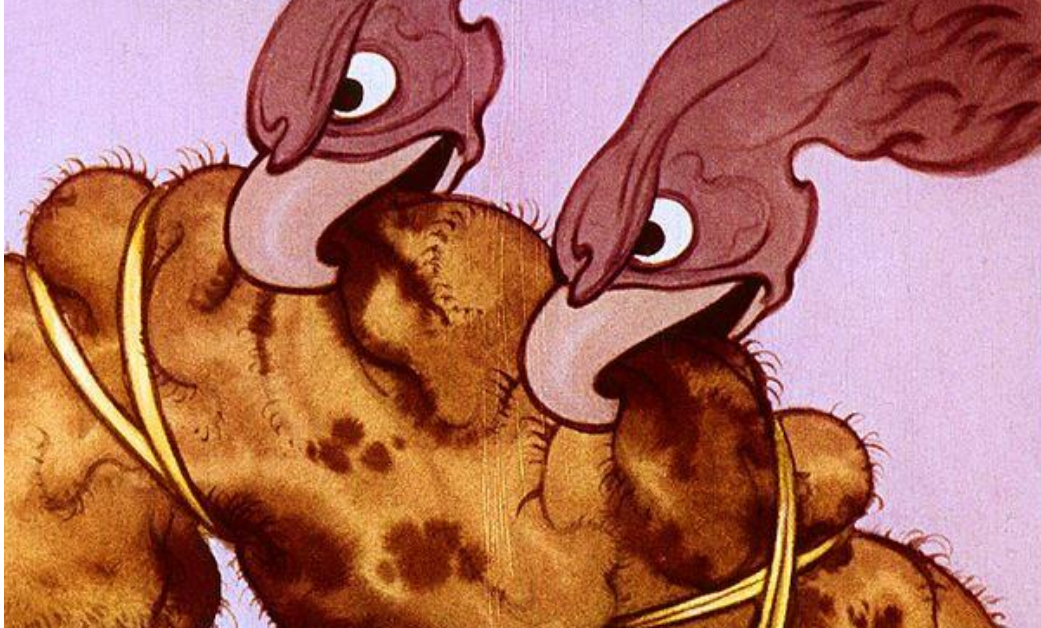
They got to the foot of a distant mountain,
and the bai stopped the camels and ordered
Mirali to take down the sacks and the bull's hide.



Mirali did so, and the bai then told him to turn the bull's hide inside out and lie down on it. Mirali could not understand the reason for this, but he dared not disobey and did as his master told him.



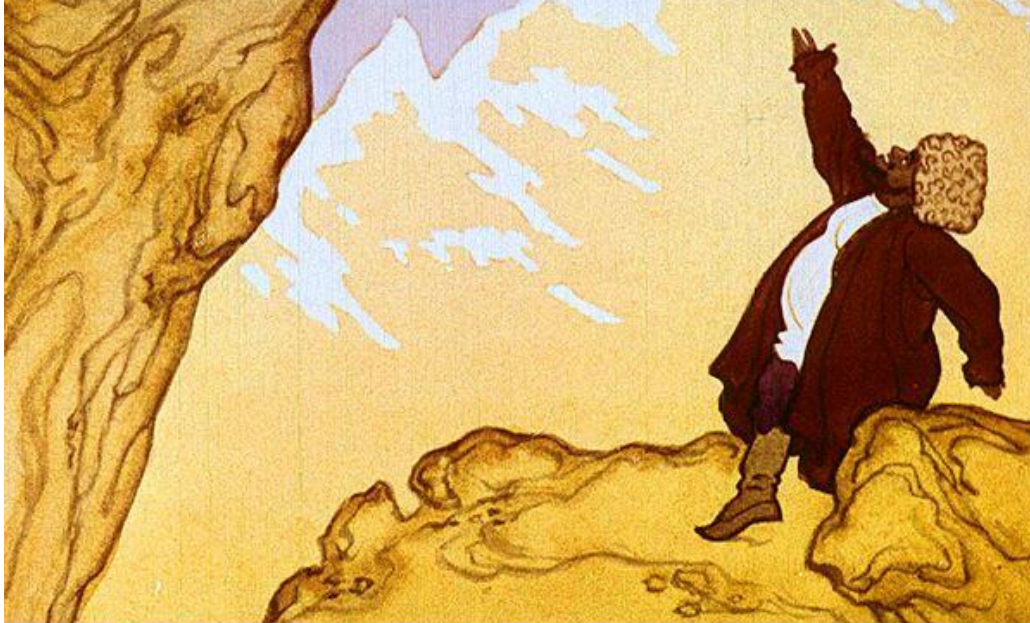
The bai rolled up the hide with
Mirali inside it into a bundle, strapped
it tight and hid himself behind a rock.



By and by two large birds of prey flew up, seized the hide which had a fresh smell of meat about it in their beaks and carried it off with them to the top of a tall mountain.



The birds began to peck and claw at the hide, and, seeing Mirali, were frightened and flew away.



Mirali got to his feet and began looking about him.

The bai saw him from below and shouted:

"What are you standing there for? Throw down to me the coloured stones that are lying at your feet!"



Mirali looked down at the ground and saw that a great number of precious stones, diamonds and rubies and sapphires and emeralds, were strewn all over it. The gems were large and beautiful and they sparkled in the sun.



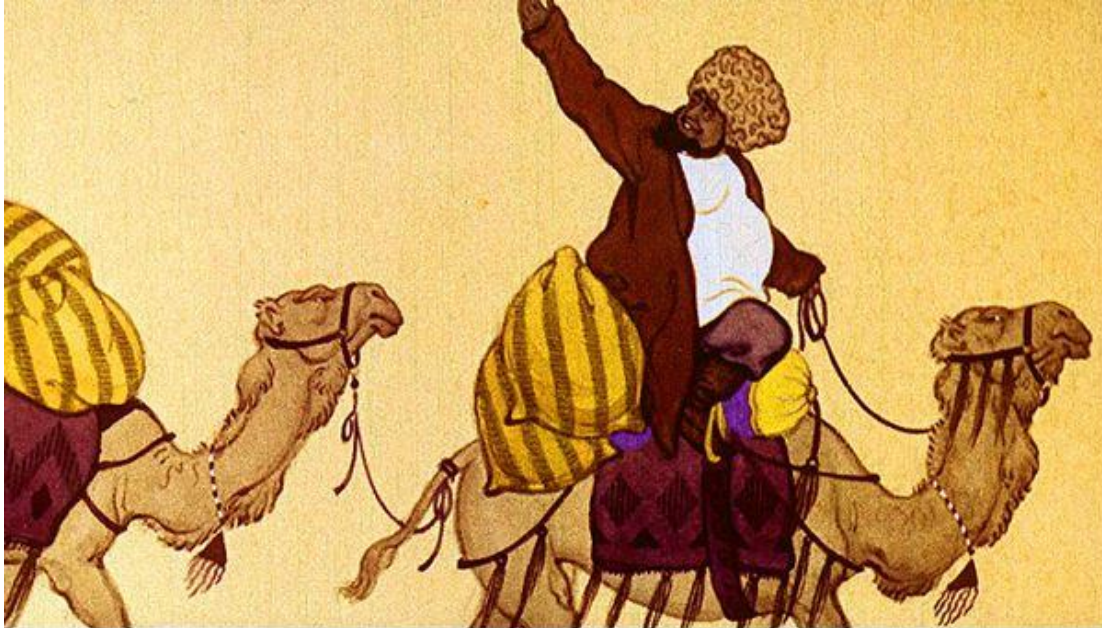
Mirali began gathering the gems and throwing them down to the bai, who picked them up as fast as they fell and filled two of the sacks with them.

Mirali kept on working until a thought struck him that turned his blood cold.

"How shall I get down from here, master?" he called to the bai.

"Throw down more of the stones," the bai called back. "I will tell you how to get down from the mountain afterwards."

Mirali believed him and went on throwing down the gems.



When the sacks were full, the bai hoisted them on to the camels' backs.

"Ho there, my son!" called he with a laugh to Mirali. "Now you can see what kind of work I give my workmen to do. See how many of them are up there, on the mountain!"

And with these words the bai rode away.



Mirali was left on the mountain top all alone. He began looking for a way to climb down, but the mountain was very steep, with precipices on all sides, and he could not find one. Men's bones lay about everywhere. They were the bones of those who, like Mirali, had been the bai's workmen.

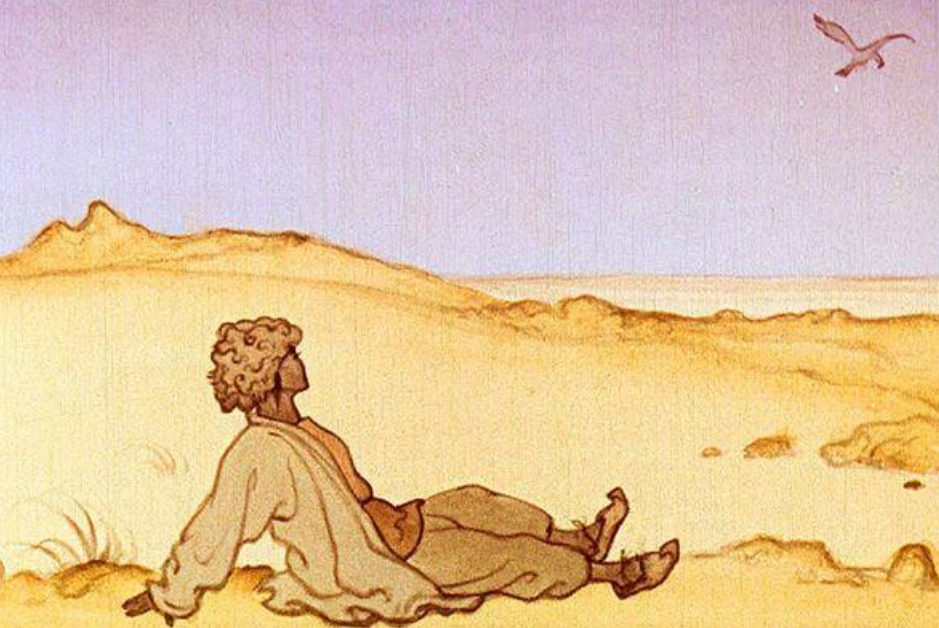
Mirali was terrified.



Suddenly there came a rush of wings overhead, and before he could turn round, a huge eagle had pounced upon him.



He was about to tear Mirali to pieces, but Mirali did not lose his presence of mind, and, grasping the eagle's legs with both hands, held them in a tight grip. The eagle let out a cry, rose up into the air and flew round and round, trying to shake off Mirali.



At last, exhausted, he dropped to the ground well below the mountain top, and when Mirali loosed his hold, flew away.



Thus was Mirali saved from a terrible death. He reached the foot of the mountain, and, going to the marketplace, began looking for work again. Suddenly he saw the bai, his former master, coming toward him.



"Do you need a workman, bai" Mirali asked him.

Now, it did not enter the bai's head that any workman of his, once he had been left on the mountain top, could have remained alive — it had never happened before — and, not recognising Mirali, he hired him and took him home with him.



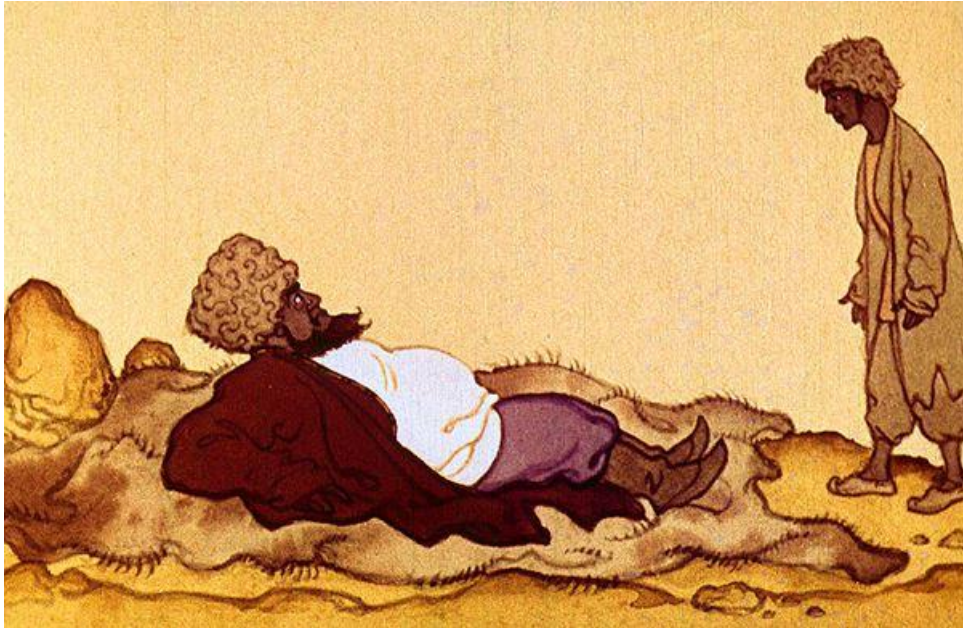
Soon after, the bid ordered Mirali to slaughter a bull and skin it, and this being done, told him to get ready two camels and bring four sacks.



They made their way to the foot of the same mountain, and, just as before, the bai told Mirali to lie down on the bull's hide and wrap himself up in it.



"Show me how it's done, for it's not quite clear to me," said Mirali.



What is there to understand? Here is the way it's done," the bai replied, and he stretched himself out on the hide which had been turned inside out.



Mirali at once rolled up the hide,
with the bai inside it, into a bundle and
strapped it tight.

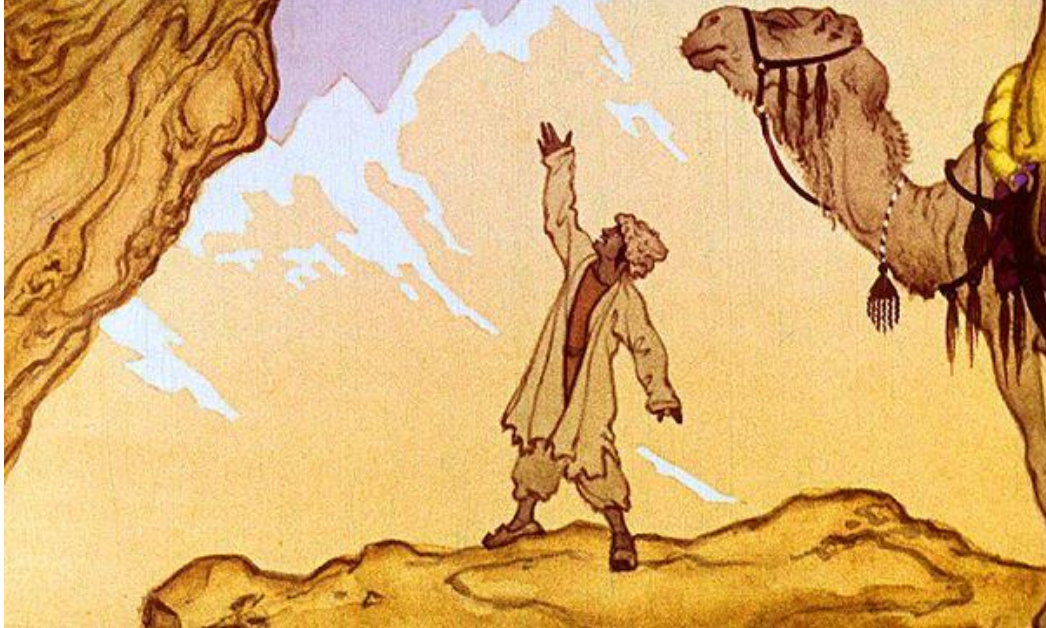


"What have you done to me, my son!" the bai cried.

The same moment two birds of prey flew up, seized the bull's hide with the bai in it and flew off with it to the mountain top.



Once there, they began to tear at it with their beaks and claws, but, seeing the bai, were frightened and flew away. The bai scrambled to his feet.



"Come bai, do not waste time, throw
down the gems to me, just as I did to you,"
Mirali called from below.

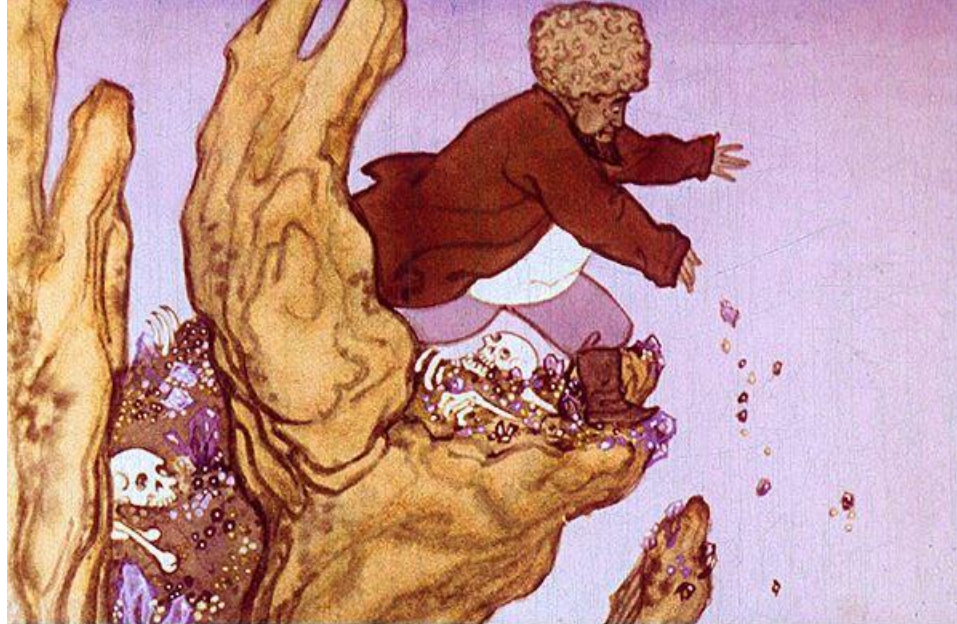


Only then did the bai recognise him
and begin trembling with fear and rage.

"How did you get down the
mountain?" he called to Mirali.



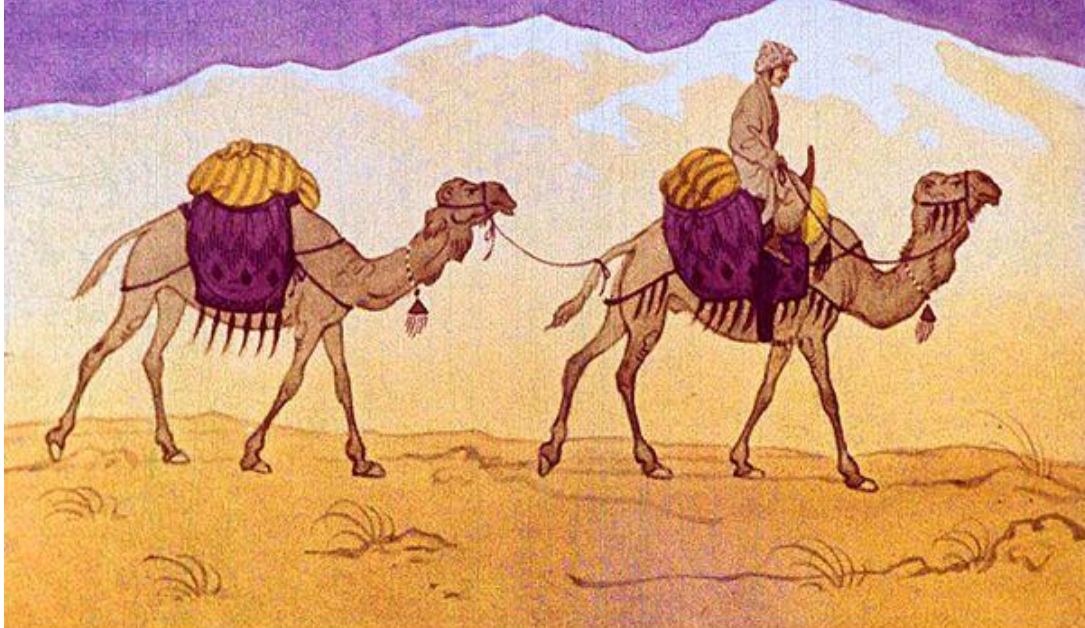
"Throw down more of the gems, and when I have enough, I'll tell you how!" Mirali called back.



The bai began throwing down the gems, and Mirali picked them up as fast as they fell. When the sacks were full, he hoisted them on to the camels' backs.



"Come, bai look around you," he called to him.
"The bones of your workmen are strewn about everywhere. Why do you not ask them how to get down from the mountain? As for me, I am going home."



And turning the camels round,
Mirali set off for his mother's house.



The bai rushed about on the mountain top, shouting threats and pleas, but all in vain, for who was there to hear him!